

THE COMPUTERWORLD HONORS PROGRAM

CASE STUDY



LOCATION:
*St. Clair Shores, Michigan,
United States*

YEAR:
2006

STATUS:
Laureate

CATEGORY:
Manufacturing

NOMINATING COMPANY:
*Siemens Information +
Communications Networks Inc*

ORGANIZATION:

Stahls' Inc.

PROJECT NAME:

Call Center Technology Upgrade / Canadian Office Connection

Summary

Stahls' Inc., a manufacturer of imprint graphics, software and equipment, helps companies get started in the business of customized garment decoration, including sportswear, uniforms and fashion apparel. Senior management at Stahls' knows providing high-quality customer service is critical to the success of the business – and the latest communications technologies can play a key role in delivering that service.

The company considered solutions from several vendors when looking to upgrade its call center. Stahls' selected to partner with Siemens and engage them to deliver many products, including Siemens' HiPath 4000, HiPath ProCenter, and a newer version of the Siemens' HiPath Xpressions unified messaging system. HiPath 4000, ProCenter and Xpressions delivered skills-based routing, detailed reporting and improved messaging. The call center upgrades gave Stahls' more efficient call routing, better response rates and lower communications costs.

Introductory Overview

Stahls', a St. Clair Shores, Michigan-based company, is a licensed supplier of major league sports, providing team logos, player names and numbers for officially licensed team uniform applications. Stahls' also works in partnership with a number of collegiate institutions, providing imprint graphic materials for a range of applications. Their customers range from individuals operating sales booths at sporting events to large enterprises with global operations.

Stahls' had effective customer support operations in place, but wanted to make current operations even better. The company had been using Siemens' technology successfully in its contact center since 2000, reaping the benefits of features like skills-based routing. But the center was in need of a technology refresh to take advantage of the latest capabilities and better serve its customers.

Stahls' wanted to be able to differentiate customers in order to service each one in the most appropriate and efficient manner. A small customer, placing one or two orders per year, has different needs than a large enterprise, placing hundreds of orders. Stahls' needed to route calls from key accounts to specially-skilled people who knew how to handle these clients.



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The project with Siemens was initiated in September 2005 and full implementation took place in January of 2006. The project was designed to create a method that not only would allow Stahls' to continue to provide superior customer services but increase efficiencies in communication and production. Siemens communication technology today connects Stahls' facilities in St. Clair Shores, Michigan with their facilities in Concord, Ontario for both voice and data communications. The purpose of the project was to not only reduce costs in communication between the two sites, but also reduce manufacturing costs while at the same time increasing efficiency in manufacturing and customer service at both locations. Stahls' also wanted to provide their traveling users with an efficient way of communicating with the customer and inside sales force while on the road. With the Siemens technology upgrade Stahls has experienced significant benefits including more efficient call routing, better response rates and lower communications costs.

Benefits

- Reduced long distance costs between sites by \$1000 per month.
- Increased efficiencies by 30 percent between sites with regard to order processing and communication.
- Supervisors and agents now get more detailed graphical reports on call center operations and performance, whereas the previous system only generated text-based reports.
- Customer Service Specialists can now extension dial to any other department in either location reducing communications breakdowns, decision time and increase customer service.
- Increased customer service by allowing each site to be an "overflow" or "backup" call center in cases of heavy call volume and on holidays. Previously, customers would be on hold or not be able to reach a customer service specialist due to a holiday.
- Upgraded Xpressions unified messaging application gives users far more flexibility. Stahls' can now record up to nine different scripts, for different times of the day, with the messages geared toward specific types of customers and their needs.
- For Stahls' employees who are frequently on the road or who work from home, the Siemens OptiClient software provides the flexibility of using a variety of mobile devices as phones.

The Importance of Technology

Stahls' selected to partner with Siemens and engage them to deliver many products, including Siemens' HiPath 4000, HiPath ProCenter, and a newer version of the Siemens' HiPath Xpressions unified messaging system. The move to HiPath 4000 from the existing Hicom 300 system went smoothly.

"Instead of ripping out what we had in place and going with a different vendor and re-training users, it made more sense from a business standpoint to go with the Siemens products," says Mike Terenzi, manager of information technology and telecommunications operations at Stahls'. "We do all the CTI programming in-house and wanted to continue doing so, resulting in Stahls' being more self-supportive from a telecommunications standpoint. Siemens' technology enables us to do that."



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Stahls' upgraded from version 2.5 of HiPath Xpressions unified messaging on Exchange to version 3.0, and also upgraded the e-mail system at the same time. The newer version of Xpressions gave users greater ability to manage message recordings.

Stahls' also deployed Siemens' IP-based communications software optiClient, which works with HiPath 3000, 4000, and 5000 environments, enabling portable or desktop PCs to function as a telephone. With optiClient, users can take their phone extension with them wherever they go.

In conjunction with the IP-based communications software, Stahls' installed a Voice over IP (VoIP) system in the Concord office, enabling employees in other facilities to place and route calls to the Ontario office much more efficiently.

Originality

The call center at Stahls' takes an average of 1500 calls per day from customers. With skills based routing system, 95 percent of the calls are answered in less than 30 seconds and routed to the best matched call center agent based on specific criteria designed by Stahls'. When customers call the Canadian toll free number or the French line these calls can be routed as needed to the Concord facility, thus providing increased customer service for the Canadian and French customers. This also provides backup to the domestic customers if necessary, especially during the holiday season.

With the VOIP connection between the two locations Stahls' also reduced long distance costs by approximately \$1000 per month. In addition, their traveling users are now able to have a 'softphone' (Siemens OptiClient) on their laptops which gives them the ability, once connected via VPN, to make phone calls as if they were sitting at a desk that was hardwired. They can extension dial, access voice mail and make long distance calls utilizing the 'softphone' as if they were in the office.

With the Siemens Speech Portal users can access voice mail, e-mail, tasks, appointments and almost any function that can be performed in Outlook via speech. This not only increases productivity, communication and availability but also increases safety for those on the road since they don't have to press buttons to access these functions even listening to voicemail.

Success

The Siemens technology upgrade was completed in January 2006 and Stahls' is continuing to experience multiple benefits from the project.

Stahls' is now able to give call center agents much more pertinent information about customers – such as their order history – ahead of time so they can better serve customers when they answer a call. Their ability to route calls to the appropriate agent has improved with the more advanced skills-based routing feature of ProCenter. The percentage of calls answered within the first 30 seconds has increased five percent since the upgrade.

A business rules routing feature examines the phone number of a caller and checks it against a customer database which determines if the caller is from a large, medium or small customer, as well as what type of agent the call should be routed to.

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performance, whereas the previous system only generated text-based reports. The new system creates many graphical reports, enabling managers to quickly spot calling trends, and agents to easily track how well they're doing handling calls and delivering customer support.

These reports have allowed Stahls to manage the staff more efficiently and allocate resources based on workload, while Supervisors can quickly assess if an agent is experiencing difficulty with customers and may need more guidance. Agents can even view statistics on their performance and try to beat their numbers.

One of the other main successes of the Siemens project can not be measured through ROI factors. Stahls' finds that it has been able to secure the safety of their traveling users with the Siemens unified messaging plan. With more and more states outlawing the use of cell phones while driving, the use of hands free devices and unified messaging tools has become a perfect solution for staying "connected" to business communications while on the go.

Traveling users can now keep both hands on the wheel while driving and still reply to e-mails and voicemails in a safe manner with unified messaging. For the busy business user saving three minutes per hour by not having to call voicemail, enter a password and listen to a message is a value that proves to be important in the long run. Stahls users can now sit in front of their computer and view all the voice messages they have received and also, if configured properly, can view the number that the call came from and quickly decide if it worth a call-back.

In today's world, everyone multi-tasks, some more than others, however, when you spend a large portion of your day on the computer, being able to see voicemail with a click of a mouse, due to unified messaging, allows that multi-tasking to be even more efficient.

Difficulty

Stahls' had several remote and traveling users that needed to have access to the entire data system in order to perform their daily work functions. Connecting an International (Canadian) site with a U.S. based site via WAN required a provider that could deliver not just the bandwidth but the quality of service on the line for VOIP to work. In addition, Stahls' wanted their circuit to be managed to ensure uptime and service. To ensure this capability, Stahls' met with their existing service provider for data to discuss the possibility of having them provide the necessary circuits for VOIP and ultimately worked out a design that met their requirements and was cost effective.

Cutting over without any downtime in both Canada and U.S. location was another requirement for Stahls'. Simultaneous cuts were not possible because of the locations, therefore the decision was made to cut the U.S. site (main site) first and then a week later cut the Canadian site which eliminated the downtime in either location. The cut at both sites was performed after business hours and in conjunction with the WAN provider.

Having the Customer Service areas in both locations on board and active participants was a major risk. If this area did not accept the change the project would fail. To overcome this risk there was a major effort to inform these areas of the benefits and IT's commitment to minimize process change. Regularly scheduled meetings were held to keep them up to date on the project and involved managers of these areas as part of the team to assist in any related design decisions.